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Bottom up Approach in Developing Relief Protocol: Case from Rajang

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Abstract

The paper elucidates the objectives, methods and findings of a research project undertaken at Rajang River. The project was carried out with the intention to identify the hazards/disasters coping mechanism used by local communities. The bottom up coping mechanism was drafted and proposed to the relevant committee as three forms of relief protocols, namely for flood, fire and riverbank erosion. It is envisaged that the protocols will help to alleviate the situation faced by the riverine communities and to complement, and initiate improvement in government's disaster management programs.

Keywords: Disaster Management, Relief Protocols, Flood, Erosion

Introduction

The Malaysian National Security Council defines a disaster as "an emergency situation of some complexity that will cause the loss of lives, damage property and the environment, and hamper local social and economic activities." However, in Sarawak, floods and droughts are actually considered hazards rather than disasters as defined by the Malaysian National Security Council. Floods and droughts become disasters only when the livelihood of the local communities are affected and interrupted¹. Another common hazard and disaster faced by riverine communities is riverbank erosions. Soda (2009) mentioned a coping mechanism for environmental transformation is symbolized by the events of riverbank erosions. In the instance of riverbank erosion, protection measures alone are insufficient, as the cause of erosion is not well investigated. Often, intervention measures are ad hoc and their effectiveness is highly doubtful. Thus, it is vital to know the root causes so that proactive measures can be recommended.

This research is carried out along the Rajang basin in Sarawak, and 28 villages and longhouses along the Rajang River were selected for survey purposes. By identifying the present hazards-cum-disasters coping mechanisms used by local communities, the government's disaster prevention or disaster management programs can be improved. Through this, resources can be properly allocated.

¹ See also Button, 2010; Donovan, 2010 for other relevant cases.